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ABSTRACT

College transfer students have been shown to have a high risk of attrition from their second institution, in part because of errors in judgment during course preregistration. Accordingly, the Admissions Office at the University of Maryland at College Park (UMCP) reviewed the proposed course registrations (for fall 1988) of a sample of transfer students who ended their first (spring 1988) semester at UMCP with an academic warning. A treatment group of 63 students were sent a letter during the summer of 1988 from a special advisor, listing recommendations for changes in the student's fall registration. For the following four semesters, the rates of academic persistence and grade point averages of this treatment group were compared with those of a comparison group of untreated transfer students. No statistically significant differences between the two groups was found on overall rates of persistence at UMCP, although students in the treatment group initially persisted at UMCP in higher numbers that the comparison group. Nor were there any statistically significant differences in academic standing. These findings suggest that such intervention by advisors in reviewing course preregistration and recommending changes needs to be followed up with other interventions, such as a diagnostic and prescriptive interview, in order to have any sustained effect on retention. (TE)

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UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

College Park, Maryland

Special Advising for New Transfer Students in Academic Jeopardy

Research Report # 7-90

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

Vivian Boyd, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Bekele Molla, Thomas Magoon, John Van Brunt

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Computer time for this project has been provided in full through the Computer Science Center of The University of Maryland at College Park

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Summary

Students who matriculate at one educational institution and subsequently transfer to a different one have been shown to be particularly at risk of attrition. One common cause of transfer students' academic difficulties lies in a proneness to make errors in judgment during their course preregistration, perhaps because of unfamiliarity with the academic system of the institution to which they transferred.

The University of Maryland at College Park (UMCP) is committed to the retention of its students, including its transfer students. In order to correct the errors in course preregistration of transfer students in academic jeopardy, the UMCP Admissions Office, in collaboration with selected colleges within UMCP, agreed to review the proposed course registration (for Fall 1988) of a sample of transfer students enrolled within the selected colleges who ended their first (Spring 1988) semester at UMCP with some type of academic warning. Selected students were sent a letter during the Summer of 1988 from a special advisor, in which the advisor listed recommendations for changes in the student's Fall registration. Students were urged to make the recommended changes as soon as possible and to contact the advisor with any questions.

For four semesters subsequent to the summer of the intervention, there were no statistically significant differences between the treatment group and a comparable nontreatment comparison group on rates of persistence at UMCP, although students in the treatment group showed an initial tendency to persist at UMCP in higher numbers than students in the comparison group. Further, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in rates of persistence in good academic standing. Indeed, almost all of the students in each group ended their second semester after transferring to UMCP with a grade point average below that needed to graduate from UMCP.

While there was some suggestion that having special advisors review course preregistration and recommend changes had a positive initial effect on the academic peristence of the students in the treatment group, the treatment was not sufficiently powerful to have a sustained effect on retention. Rather, the intervention should be followed up with an intervention shown to have a more long-term effect on retention, such as the diagnostic and prescriptive interview.

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Special Advising for New Transfer Students in Academic Jeopardy

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Students who matriculate at one educational institution and subsequently transfer to a different one have been shown to be particularly at-risk of attrition. Significant negative effects for educational attainment have been found on students who transfer from one four year college to another (Kocher and Pascarella, 1990).

The University of Maryland at College Park (UMCP) is committed to the retention of its students, including those who matriculate elsewhere and transfer to UMCP. Many students who enter UMCP have transferred here from a smaller campus, such as a community college or a small four year college, find their first semester here disorienting and unsettling. Further, new transferins who end their first semester here on academic warning are particularly vulnerable to dismissal. For example, 42% of the Fall 1986 new transferins who ended their first semester on academic warning were dismissed at the end of the next semester.

One common cause of transfer students' academic dfficulties lies in a proneness to make errors in judgment during their course preregistration for their second semester, perhaps because of unfamiliarity with the academic system (e.g., prerequisites, courses with heavy reading assignments, etc.) and lack of adequate advising.

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In order to correct the errors in course preregistration of transfer students in academic jeopardy, the UMCP Admissions Office, in collaboration with selected colleges within UMCP, agreed to review the proposed registration for Fall 1988 of students enrolled within the selected colleges who ended their first semester here (Spring 1988) with some type of academic warning.

METHOD

Special advisors within the Colleges of Agriculture, Life Sciences, Computer Science, Human Ecology, Arts and Humanities, Business and Social Sciences, and General Studies, reviewed the course preregistration of January 1988 transfer-ins who ended their first semester at UMCP on academic warning. The course registrations which, in the judgment of the special advisors contained errors, were placed in one of two piles (treatment and comparison). Students whose registration fell in the treatment pile were sent a letter in July 1988 from the special advisor, in which the advisor listed recommendations for changes in the student's Fall registration. Students were urged to make the recommended changes as soon as possible during the summer and to contact the special advisor with any questions.

Students in the comparison group were uncontacted.

Outcome variables

Two variables were examined, for the treatment and control groups, to determine the effectiveness of the intervention on subsequent retention:

1. academic persistence, defined as enrolled for a given semester, or graduated;

2. academic persistence in good standing, defined as enrolled for a given semester and entering that semester with no academic action taken as a result of the previous semester.

Data concerning registration and academic performance were obtained from University records. The outcome variables were examined for four semesters after the intervention.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows rates of academic persistence by group.

Table 1.

Rates of Academic Persistence by Group

	Group			
	Treatment		Comparison	
initial n	63		57	
Semester	n	%	n	%
Fall '88	57	91	48	84
Spring '89	34	54	25	44
Fall '89	24	38	20	35
Spring '90	24	38	22	39

For four semesters subsequent to the intevention, there were no statistically significant differences between the treatment and comparison groups on rates of academic persistence, although students in the treatment group showed an initial tendency to persist at UMCP in higher numbers than did students in the comparison group.

Table 2 shows rates of academic persistence in good standing by group.

Table 2.

Academic Persistence in Good Standing by Group

	Group			
	Treatment		Comparison	
initial n	63		57	
Semester	n	%	n	%
Fall '88	2	3	2	4
Spring '89	16	25	13	23
Fall '89	17	27	14	25
Spring '90	17	27	17	30

There were no statistically significant differences between the treatment and comparison groups in rates of academic persistence in good standing. Indeed, almost all of the students in each group ended their second semester after transferring to UMCP in academic jeopardy. Recall that these students were selected in part because during their first semester at UMCP they had earned a grade point average less than the minimum needed to graduate from UMCP.

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study highlight the vulnerability of students who transfer to UMCP and end their first semester here in academic jeopardy. For example, approximately two-thirds of the students studied for this report who transferred to UMCP for the Spring 1988 semester were no longer enrolled at UMCP three semesters later, nor had they graduated from here.

While there was some initial suggestion that having special advisors review course preregistration and recommend changes had

a positive effect on the academic persistence of students in the treatment group, the figures in Tables 1 and 2 clearly indicate that the treatment was not sufficiently powerful to have a sustained effect on these students' retention. The low percentage of students who persisted at UMCP in good academic standing, both in the treatment group and in the comparison group, suggests that it is not only poor judgment or lack of good advising in selecting courses that places these students in academic jeopardy, and that they may have benefitted from further proactive interventions such as a diagnostic and prescriptive intervention found to be successful with students who have earned more than 30 credits (Retention Study Group, 1989). Similarly, other interventions of a more long-term nature may be indicated, given the robust nature of the proclivity of transfer-ins to leave the institution before earning their degree.

References

Kocher, E., and Pascarella, E. (1990). The impact of 4-year college transfer on the early status attainment of black-American and white-American students. Journal of College Student Development, 31, 169-175.

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Appendix 16

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